THE BI-MONTHLY

Newsletter of the Bisexual Center

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Bringing up Father & Mother

by Tom Mapp

I "came out" bi to my parents years ago, but poor communication on both sides (part of a family history of suppressing discussion of feelings) has left confusion and much unsaid. I have tried to attack that problem in various ways. Recently I sent an article which outlined some procedures for verbalizing feelings that I hoped would open up a new communication channel. First I want to outline that article, then present parts of the letter I wrote to my parents.

The two techniques are designed to emphasize that an expressed feeling is the property of the person experiencing it, rather than the responsibility of the person with whom one is interacting.

One technique involves making statements in the form "When you did (A SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR OR ACTIVITY), I felt (ACTUAL EMOTIONAL RESPONSE, I.E., "ANGRY", "HURT"). The listener is asked to not reply, but to listen to this "action-feeling statement." The second technique has the speaker expressing personal suspicions as to what the listener is thinking or feeling, and invites the listener to try to find a grain of truth in the stated "paranoid fantasy."

With this admittedly broad overview, I can now share an edited version of the letter which I sent to my parents some weeks ago;

Dear Mother and Father,

It seems that we have been out of contact lately, so I thought I'd write to let you know what's going on for me. I hope that you enjoyed that article which I sent recently. I am going to try to use those techniques for expressing emotions in this letter. I hope that it will open areas to discussion that were off limits before.

Since my trip to Hawaii, I have felt empowered to take greater control of my life. The main direction in which I am using that power is to turn my attention to learning more about just who I am, in the process throwing off many of the "shoulds", "oughts", and "musts" which I have accepted during my life. I have become extremely sensitive to any attempts to keep me from my goal of self-realization, especially by attempting to make me conform to someone else's standards.

Now I need to express some feelings, using the techniques of that article. When I found out Father had sent me a tape about gay men who had been "cured", then I felt angry. When I hear someone imply that homosexuality is an illness, I feel hurt and angry. I suspect that both Mother and Father would like me to change to conform to heterosexual norms. I suspect that Father believes he has the right to change me to fit his idea of what is correct. I believe that Father does not accept me being myself. I believe that Father thinks homosexuality and bisexuality are the result of illness.

I believe that homosexuality is normal for some people. For some of us the idea of being denied loving feelings for either sex is repression which we will fight. And it is my right to be sexual with any consenting adult, whether man or woman.

One reason that you two have heard little from me in recent months is that I have a girlfriend these days. I do not feel comfortable communicating with you on these issues. If you cannot accept my homosexual side, then you are not invited to hear about my heterosexual side. And my relationships are very important to me. I don't feel close to anyone with whom I cannot share communication about this part of my life.

Concerning father's tape on "curing" homosexuality, it does not surprise me that there are some men who feel liberated to become heterosexual. But I want to know whether cutting off their homosexual side really liberated them. (Being bisexual, I have trouble understanding how anyone would choose to throw away loving feelings for the same sex or the opposite sex.)

The reality for me is that there is a great deal of support in our culture for being heterosexual and very little for being homosexual. I guess that is partly why I pull harder for the underdog, and I feel especially compassionate for people who go through the terrifying experience of realizing that they have homosexual feelings and

who know that to suppress those feelings is suppressing their own nature. Some discrimination of heterosexuals and bisexuals also exists within the homosexual subculture, that is true, but it seems much less extreme than what homosexuals and bisexuals experience from the heterosexual societal norms. "Coming out" to myself was a wrenching experience for me and that is why I have patience with you in your difficulty in accepting me as I am. I insist, however, that your choices are limited to accepting me or rejecting me--changing me into what you want is not a possibility which I will allow.

All this talk about sexuality is necessary for me because that is the area in which I feel non-acceptance from you. Perhaps we shall one day be close enough to share meaningful communication on these and other issues. I would like this letter to be a step toward greater understanding and acceptance between us.

May the blessings be---

EVENTS

BI GAMES 1984!!

Tom and Phil will be hosting a Games Night on Sunday, November 11th. It will begin at 5 p.m. and run until 11. Come to 779 Frederick St. (off Arguello) in San Francisco for a fun evening with friends. Bring cards, games, munchies, drinks, and yourself! A $2.00 donation for the Center will be requested. For more information, contact Tom or Phil at 681-7563.

MEMBERS-ONLY HOLIDAY SEASON PARTY

Celebrate the holiday season with both old friends and new at a party hosted by Barbara. Bring munchies, beverages, and good cheer! Dress up...or dress down!! Members may bring one non-member guest. A $3.00 donation for the Center is requested.

DATE: December 8th
TIME: 8:30 p.m. - 2:00 a.m.
PLACE: 2267A Turk St. (at Masonic)
CALL 921-3228 FOR MORE INFORMATION.

BI OUTING TO ORR HOT SPRINGS

Want to get away from it all among friends? Orr is a beautiful secluded hot springs located three hours north of the City in Mendocino County. Hike in a nearby valley full of redwoods, or just lie back and enjoy the hot tubs and sauna. Orr is a clothing-optional environment.

The cost to stay in the group room, known as "the healing room", is $20/night. If 10 or more people get deposits (half the fee) in by December 8th, we can have exclusive use of the healing room. Cabins and camping sites are also available. You may wish to go up Saturday morning and stay only one night. A potluck is planned for Saturday evening and for Sunday's breakfast. Dates are January 18-20, with Friday tentative, based on the demand. Get in your reservations early! Call Tom and Phil for more information at 681-7563.

WOMEN'S RAP GROUP

Due to poor attendance, the women's rap will suspend meetings for now. Women wishing to talk to other women can leave a message for Naomi at 431-4431; she will return the call.

The Bisexual Identity

PART III. BISEXUALITY AND THE CONCEPT OF "MARGINALITY"

by Jay Paul

In trying to understand the situation of the bisexual, it helps to consider a sociological concept known as marginality. (By "bisexual", I mean someone who either self-defines as bisexual or someone who may not choose a label, but who has sexual and emotional attachments to both sexes.)

The notions of marginality and marginal personality were expanded by Stonequist in the 1930's. "Marginality" refers to the set of circumstances faced by those who have not found, or cannot accept, a clear group membership role. As they are not fully integrated into any one group, there is no group in which they are not to some extent "outsiders".

Traditionally, this concept has been applied to members of mixed ethnic groups (e.g., "half-breeds"), but it also helps to make sense of some of the special issues and experiences of bisexuals. Our society not only tends to dichotomize sexual orientation, but confers a kind of "disadvantaged minority status" on those labeled as homosexual--such being the social power of such terms. It is clear that bisexuals do not fit the conventional categories of sexual identity used in our society, so that their situation is not so unlike those once termed "half-breeds".

The circumstances of marginality have ramifications both for the individual and the larger social system. The individual must try to integrate what can be two very different self-notions, sets of activities, and social groups. The theory suggests certain specific consequences for the marginal person, but also notes that the larger society is forced to make certain accommodations or pigeon-holing decisions when faced with the marginal individual. Stonequist noted that such a person

> presents a special problem for the community: What is to be his place in the social organization? As he matures he too will become aware of his problematic and anomalous social position. He will become the target of whatever hostile sentiments exist between the parent races.

Does this ring any bells? Self-defining as bisexual often is met with antagonism by both heterosexuals and homosexuals, with "straights" having similar homophobic reactions to bisexuals and homosexuals, while the hostility and rejection of gay men and lesbians derives from several sources. But a general reaction has been that the bisexual identity is rejected as invalid, and conformity to the "choice" of homosexual or heterosexual is demanded.

When trying to make sense of the attractions felt for both men and women, this is not a comfortable environment to be in. A homosexual or heterosexual self-definition may feel both partly true and partly false. If one feels that the only choice one has is to associate part-time with the gay/lesbian communities (while keeping one's heterosexual feelings "closeted") and part-time with the mainstream "straight" world (keeping one's homosexual side "in the closet"), life is apt to feel somewhat fragmented. Against that is the questioning and rejection one may face if publically identifying as bisexual.

There is an assumption by some that the bisexual label is chosen simply because it carries less stigma than the labels "gay" or "lesbian". Plus individuals who used it as a transitional label are pointed to, as if their situation could be generalized and all "bisexuals" seen as simply too timid or "closeted" to "really" come out.

The political nature of what is ostensibly a label to identify the gender of one's sexual and affectional partners rapidly becomes apparent. The creation of an independent separatist community of lesbians and gays with both separate leaders and political clout is actually a new and unique phenomenon in many ways in the known history of homosexuality. Gays and lesbians often assume that the refusal to identify as homosexual is a refusal to align with them in their struggle against heterosexism and both social and political repression. The myth that the bisexual will melt into the heterosexual community when "the going gets rough" is too common.

This supposed lack of commitment to the homosexual community can also be personalized within relationships of bisexuals and gay men or lesbians. Identifying as bisexual may be viewed as an unwillingness to make a serious emotional commitment to a homosexual partner. Or it may be supposed that the bisexual will invariably favor heterosexuality over homosexuality (in flat contradiction to the equally prejudiced warnings of "Ann Landers" to heterosexuals getting involved with bisexuals!)

In light of this ungenerous reception, it is not surprising that few who might be considered bisexual on the basis of their sexual histories identify as bisexual. In Kinsey's research on men, there was a 3:2 ratio of those with a significant degree of both heterosexuality and homosexuality in their histories to those exclusively or almost exclusively homosexual. On the other hand, a recent survey of the San Francisco electorate suggested a 1:3 ratio of self-defined bisexuals to self-defined homosexuals.

C.A.Tripp delineated a number of rationalizations an individual may use to "engage in homosexuality while continuing to define himself as a regular member of society, one who in no essential way is set apart from it." Few acknowledge that those same rationalizations may serve the people who continue to define as gay or lesbian while engaging in heterosexual relationships.

A sexual label is both a very personal summation of one's sexual and affectional experiences and interests, and a declaration to the social organization of one's affiliations within it. These labels have an increasingly powerful impact on one's social identity because of the separate existence of a supposedly unified homosexual community from the mainstream heterosexual society. Sexual identity therefore presumes to characterize both the nature of one's sexual partners and one's social milieu and sense of group allegiance.

Without a distinct bisexual community or support network, the bisexual person may risk a loss of social position and relationships in both subgroups by the refusal to adopt an acceptable sexual label and the open acknowledgement of her or his bisexuality. Initially the problem of marginality can be countered by a stronger, more visible bisexual community. But our longterm goal should not be one of increasing the categorization of people by isolating one salient factor to define another group. Rather, we should wish for a point when our culture can recognize the complexity and fluidity of human sexuality, rejecting all simplistic pigeon-holing of people by their partners' gender. Initially, then, if we must, let us be described as heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual; someday we may all simply be acknowledged as sexual.

Research

Are you between the ages of 18 and 28, and do you have a bi, lesbian or gay parent? (Or do you know someone who fits this description?) Well, Jay Paul would like to talk to you about participating in his doctoral dissertation research. He is interested in how the children of nonheterosexual parents look at families, parenting, marriage, friendships and sexuality. His interest is in how people view the range of possible options they have in relationships. Participation involves one meeting for an interview and a brief questionnaire, taking 1½ to 2 hours. (Those outside the Bay Area may fill out the interview schedule as a questionnaire and return to Jay Paul.) If interested, contact him at (415)848-0313 (or leave a message at 841-6500) or write him at 1907 Haste St. #3D, Berkeley, CA 94704.

EAST BAY BI RAP GROUPS

A group for bisexual men and women is run by Wilma Bass (an active, Gestalt-trained therapist) every Sunday night from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Pacific Center (2712 Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley). The members routinely go out for coffee afterwards. Call Nate Brown at 235-7179, or call 482-2819 and ask for Don Honor for more information. A Wednesday night bi women's rap group also meets regularly: call the Pacific Center at 841-5224 for details. The Pacific Center asks for a $3 donation for their groups. An 8-week closed bi group, possibly starting in December, is being planned, as is the potential of a weekend workshop. Contact Alan Rockway at the Pacific Center for details.

BOARD MEETINGS

The next two meetings of the Board of Directors of the Bisexual Center will be Monday, November 12th and Monday, December 10, at 7:30 p.m. The November meeting will be at the home of David Lourea; the December meeting place is TBA. Members welcome!!

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

The newsletter wants to hear from you: What have been your bisexual life experiences, fantasies, struggles, triumphs? Share what is important to you with the rest of the bisexual community reading the newsletter--in letters to the editor, articles, poems, drawings, etc. In what direction would you like the bisexual community to grow? Let us know! The deadline for the next Bi-Monthly is December 12th. Mail all materials to Jay Paul, 1907 Haste St. #3D, Berkeley, CA 94704.

BI POL

Bi Pol, an independent bisexual, lesbian and gay political action group, welcomes you to join its monthly meetings. For more information on Bi Pol and when and where it will next meet, call 928-4194 or write to Bi Pol, P.O. Box 26227, San Francisco, CA 94126.

JOIN A BI CENTER COMMITTEE!

At the September 23rd meeting, four committees grew out of a division of duties of the Bisexual Center. Interested people are urged to call up any of the contact people listed to find out more about what they can do to make sure the Center continues to exist, now that we do not have a physical location.

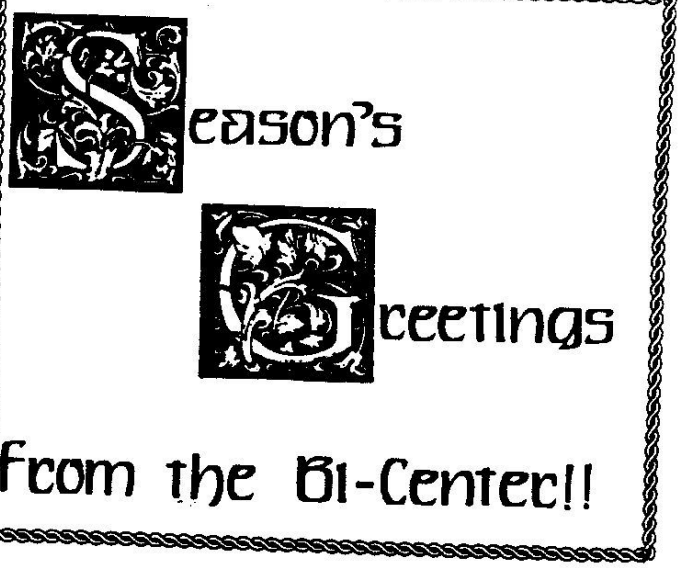
→ The SOCIAL COMMITTEE consists of Tom, Phil, Autumn, Barbara (Dave), and Grant at present. It is working on arranging social events. If you have ideas, can offer a home or space for a party or group, or want to help out in some way, contact Tom at 681-7563

→ The OUTREACH COMMITTEE has taken over the duties of the Center's Speaker's Bureau, and with answering letters and phone calls to the Center. Those involved include Judy, Dolores, Thyme, and Maggi (as consultant). A list of people with experience in public speaking is being compiled for future requests for bi presentations. If interested in this or in helping out on the Outreach Committee, contact Judy at 621-5566.

→ The NEWSLETTER COMMITTEE is working on keeping The Bi-Monthly alive. It includes Jay, Clifford, Nate, Thyme, Becca, Dick and John. We are looking for people to submit material for the newsletter, to help out with layout, and to help in seeking advertising or other sources of revenue. Layout for the next newsletter will be on December 16th, at noon, at Jay's home. Another meeting is tentatively set for November 18th at noon. For more information, contact Jay at 848-0313 or leave a message at 841-6500.

→ The RAP GROUP COMMITTEE is working on possible future directions the Center's groups may take. They are currently getting together on a weekly basis. The committee includes Naomi, Patrick, Chris, Bill, Phil, and David. If interested in getting groups going again as part of the Bisexual Center, contact Chris at 647-0499.

REMEMBER, THE BISEXUAL CENTER DEPENDS ON ITS MEMBERS TO KEEP GOING. THE WAY TO KEEP THESE COMMITTEES ACTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE IS TO SHOW THAT YOU, AS A MEMBER, ARE INTERESTED AND WILLING TO HELP OUT IN SOME MANNER. GIVEN THAT EACH COMMITTEE HAS A DIFFERENT FOCUS, YOU CAN CHOOSE TO WORK A LITTLE ON WHATEVER IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU ABOUT THE CENTER! FURTHERMORE, THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE CENTER IS INTERESTED IN GAINING NEW BOARD MEMBERS WHO WANT TO HELP DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF THE BISEXUAL CENTER.



ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertising space in The Bi-Monthly is now available to members at $1.00 per 42-letter line, or $5.00 per business card. Sorry, no "personals"--but you can advertise if trying to form a bi group for a particular interest or activity.

BISEXUAL CENTER T-SHIRTS--BY MAIL!

Order yours now! Just $12 each, including postage and handling. These shirts are red, have our logo and name on the front, and say "Love spans the spectrum" on the back. Available in Small, Medium, Large, and Extra Large sizes. Just send in form below:

Please send me ___ Bi Center T-shirts in the following size(s): _____

Enclosed is my payment of $12 per shirt, paid in:

[ ] CASH [ ] MONEY ORDER [ ] CHECK

(Please make out checks to "The Bisexual Center".)

MAILING ADDRESS:

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

THE BISEXUAL CENTER

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